

Why women are obsessed with appearance

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



The human physical appearance is very vital in the development of social relations with the others as they interact. The appearance is also important in relation to an individual's personality. Because human beings are influenced by what they can see, physical attractiveness of a person plays a very important role in social relations. The physical characteristics or features that are seen in men and women are an expression of sexual dimorphisms in human. This is due to the physical differences that exist between men and women.

A woman's physical appearance affects how she socially interacts with other women and men because when it comes to the appearance, human beings have proved to be very sensitive to variation in appearance. Some of the factors that can be attributed to variation in appearance include age, genetic factors, diseases and personal adornments. Physiological differences between individuals can be seen in physical features such as the body hair, height, bodyweight, hair colour, shape of the ears and nose, body deformations and body shape.

Appearance can also be affected by short term occurrences such as crying, skin colour changes and sexual arousal. In the contemporary world, the appearance of an individual whether a man or a woman is considered to have great significance. This is especially true for women who are considered to be very concerned and obsessed with their appearance. Cornell (Cornell, 1998) states that women have in the past years expressed their determination, dedication and great efforts as they seek to get equal opportunities with the men. To women, they have been denied equal opportunities with the men who have dominated the world for a long time.

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Through their appearance, women can win the attention that they may fight for feminism. This has made many women to invest their time, efforts, and resources in order to attain an appearance that is desirable to them.

Although men are also concerned about their appearance, majority of men do not allocate as much time, energy and financial resources to enhance their certain appearances like women do. Changing someone's physiological features whether in long-term or short-term has become an issue of concern for many, whereby personal effects and clothing have become important in promoting changes in appearance for women.

The use of decorative objects, body shape altering devices, cosmetics, body modifications, change of haircut or hair colour, and changing dressing styles have become very common in women. Technological advancements have resulted to new and more advanced ways of changing the appearance, a good example being cosmetic surgery. Plastic of cosmetic surgery is now being embraced as one of the most advanced way that is currently available to women who would like to change their physiological appearance. In this paper, the reason behind women's obsession with their appearance will be discussed.

The discussion will be based on the theory that women are obsessed with their appearance because of their concern of their future existence and the need to maintain their feminine identity. Discussion There are many reasons why women are obsessed with their appearance. However, the reason why certain individuals may be obsessed with their appearance may vary depending on the experiences one have had in her life. Some reasons seem

to contribute greatly to the obsession women have with their appearance.

These reasons will be discussed below;

1. Women's concern about their future existence. Women are considered to be concerned about their appearance due to the influence their appearance have on their future. This opinion is also supported by Gillis et al (Gillis et al, 2007). The future existence of a woman is based on her attractiveness. This is a factor that many women may not be consciously aware of.

Women's anxiety about the future promotes their engagement in efforts that aim at making their appearance more attractive. Because women pursuit for attractive appearance is related to future, their obsession with appearance is centrally tied to their relationships with men.

This is because. The future of women depends on co-workers, husbands, employers, and lovers who are men. One reason why women show their obsession with their appearance is the conviction that a woman's life is fulfilled and her continued existence guaranteed depending on her ability to attract and be attached to a particular man. This ability defines what her future holds for her. In almost all societies, relationships between men and women are considered to be very important. Even in the ancient societies, women were viewed as very crucial since they played the important role of mothers and wives.

A woman's ability to attract a man, especially the one who she can marry is to some extent related to her physical appearance. This is in relation to her body shape, body size, colour of her skin and hair, and her natural beauty. In order to share power and wealth, many women tend to enhance their bodies'

potential as objects of men desires. This gives a woman's body great sexual significance in the society. Women invest their time, energy, efforts and resources to enhance an appearance that will be desirable and attractive to men.

This is especially true when it comes to a man who proposes to marry a woman. Apart from a woman's concern about her appearance before marriage, appearance still remains an important issue even in marriage. In the contemporary society, a woman's worth and acceptance is promoted by her being married. To many, marriage still remains the natural mode of a female being a woman. Price and Shidrick (Price and Shildrick, 1999) state that since the ancient times, the societies have given certain socioeconomic and historical positions to woman.

These positions restrict women to take care of the households and children and they have been for some time strengthened even more by the commercial media. Women's obsession with appearance does not entirely depend on their personal preference to pursue attractiveness. Their pursuit for attractiveness emanates from the need to give their bodies some power. The power that women acquire through the appearance of their bodies determines what kind of a husband they get and also how they relate with employers or co-workers.

It is these people who define how her future will be like. Therefore, a woman's obsession with appearance can be attributed to her desire to give her body some power that will ensure she gets a good husband and family in the future, as well as assure her of her success as a result of good relations

with male co-workers or employers. Women use decorative or attractive items to enhance their appearance that attracts the right men. For instance, cosmetics and jewelry still remain as very important personal effects to a woman.

These items increase a woman's beauty and make her more attractive to men who are likely to be beneficial to her life in future. Pharmaceutical companies are now manufacturing many and different cosmetic products for women to use in their pursuit for attractiveness or good appearance.

Marrakchi (Marrakchi, 2006) links women's obsession with their appearance to the production of harmful and toxic cosmetic products. These products which have been viewed as contributing to the many cases of diseases such as cancer in the modern society.

Decorative objects such as earrings, bracelets, necklaces, and rings have become part and parcel of many women's lives. In an ideal traditional marriage, a woman's beauty is seen as though to be exchanged with a man's power, wealth, and influence. Because marriage becomes part of a woman's future, enhancing an attractive appearance that will assist her attract a good husband has promoted a woman's obsession with good appearance. Her future that depends on how well she can attract good men as a potential husband determines how far a woman may be willing to go in order to get the "right" appearance.

The appearance to her will in future give her some worth and will ensure she is accepted in the society if she relates to the right men. The future existence of a woman is promoted by the happiness she gets in life and the

fulfillment of romantic love that she receives. Gerhard (Gerhard, 2001) asserts that the society has made marriage attractive and desirable to women by associating future happiness and fulfillment of romantic love to a marriage. Future happiness and fulfillment of romantic love is associated with a marriage.

Because the society tends to present a marriage as an institution that makes women acceptable and gives them some worth, some women fear that they will lose their worth if they fail to attract men who can marry them. Because a woman may consider being married as “doing the proper thing”, her ability to attract a man for marriage becomes her focus. The fear of being seen as a failure or a “social misfit” if she is not married motivates a woman to seek an attractive appearance. By ensuring that she remains attractive, a woman increases her opportunity to have her romantic love and happiness fulfilled.

Furthermore, her worth and acceptance in the society is retained, a situation that increases her happiness. A woman's failure to attract men makes her lose her worth or makes her feel that she is not as good as other attractive women. Women's obsession with appearance can therefore be attributed to their desire to get happiness and fulfillment of romantic love in future. In addition, her attractive appearance boosts her self confidence and esteem hence she feels that she has great worth in the society. For example, in some societies, women who do not get married may not be highly regarded.

As compared to their married counterparts, unmarried women are viewed as people who are not happy or are unfulfilled in relation to romantic love.

When marriage becomes an important institution for a woman in future, ensuring that one gets married has led to their obsession with an appearance that they seek to have so as to attract men they are likely to marry. 2. The need for a woman to change with the changes in the society A society is always dynamic, which demands that the society members embrace changes that occur.

Phillips (Phillips, 2004) holds the opinion that changes that are experienced in the society determine the kind of a society we will have in future. The changes in turn result to changes in the peoples' attitudes and lifestyle. The changes that have been experienced in the contemporary society have made the people to adopt an attitude that thinness is beauty. The opinion that the thinner a woman is the more attractive she is continues to encourage a huge number of women to adopt a lifestyle that promotes one's body thinness even at the expense of an individual's health.

The opinion that for one to be attractive they have to be thin has become very popular. This has altered the eating lifestyles of the people by promoting dieting and physical exercises. For instance, many teenagers have been found to be engaged in dieting practices with the aim to obtaining small body sizes so as to resemble their skinny and thin role models. The media is flooded with advertisements that display a woman's body thinness as the ideal and more attractive feminine body shape as compared to average or huge women.

For instance, the current fashion industry has promoted modeling as a very lucrative career for those who are determined to become successful models.

Women who are tall and thin are now being viewed as the most beautiful. Consequently, the women's desire to resemble the thin and tall models they view as the most attractive has promoted their obsession with appearance. Even for women who are successful in other career fields other than modeling, there seems to be a belief that a good career cannot be a substitute for an individual's attractiveness.

Attempts by women to make themselves more attractive by becoming thin has led to the manufacture of a wide range of weight losing equipment or products and their sale in the market. Although some items are important to promote health, some equipment and items have ended up affecting the users' bodies negatively. Dieting has become the order of the day for some women whereby some women starve themselves in their efforts to cut down weight or to remain thin. Whether women's efforts to remain thin are encouraged for the right reasons still remains debatable.

Obese or overweight women are currently viewed as lacking the proper feminine body. In addition, a woman who is youthful looking and fashionably thin is considered to be more attractive to the modern man as compared to those fat-looking women. To many women, an individual who is fat or big in size is seen as experiencing psychological problems and is inadequate and incompetent by failing to manage their body size. Hence she becomes a person who fails in adjustments. Because being huge is considered as a sign of lack of control, women who are overweight or huge are looked down upon. Therefore women who do not lose weight to be thin tend to see themselves as objects of rejection and hate. Furthermore, they look at themselves as

inevitable failures. This undermines an individual's self-esteem leading to isolation, pretended cheerfulness, and loneliness. In the North American society, being thin translates to "looking good" for young girls and women. This means that the girls and women should do almost everything possible so as to avoid becoming fat or to remain thin. Having a fair and clear skin has become an important factor in the definition of attractiveness.

Increased desire to remain thin and to have a fair skin has led to women's obsession with their appearance. 3. Women's struggle to retain their feminine identity Women's struggle to retain their feminine identity is another factor that has promoted their obsession with their appearance. As explained by Hill (Hill, 2000), women consider their body shape, body size, and their personality to define who they are. A woman relates who she is to the behaviours and qualities that the society considers appropriate for her.

Some of the features that show a woman's feminine identity include, kindness, submissiveness, patience and gentleness. Throughout history, women have gone to extreme ends to bring out features or characteristics that strengthen their femininity. For instance, large breast size in the contemporary society is considered an important feminine trait. Many women in the western culture are now emphasizing on their cleavage to promote and enhance their femininity. This they do by wearing clothing that emphasizes of their breasts and cleavage.

High heeled shoes have become very common with women despite the discomfort they cause them. Plastic or cosmetic surgery has become a lucrative business for the professionals who are trained in that field. Many

women, especially the wealthy ones are now turning to cosmetics surgery as a solution to the old skin, old age and unattractive body shape. Due to the woman's preference for an ideal body shape that resembles that of the models, altering the body shape is now being done through cosmetic surgery. The process is expensive which makes it difficult for majority of women to afford it.

Those that cannot afford cosmetic surgery services however go for other options of changing their body shapes. For example, pharmaceutical companies sometimes manufacture drugs and equipment that can enhance hips, breast and waist size as an individual would like to have. The body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) has been attributed to women's failure to acquire feminine appearance they would prefer. Many industries that are doing well in the market depend highly on the women's investment as they seek attractive appearance. The pursuit of women's attractiveness has overtaken their lives.

The search for feminine attractiveness has made any work of beautification that does not fall within the domain of promoting feminine characteristics to be insignificant. Perfecting appearance through the perceived appropriate feminine characteristics has become the major concern and work that women engage in. By ensuring that their feminine identity is maintained and enhanced, women's body have become a road that maps their future identify. The appearance of their body defines the women's feminine identify. In the contemporary society, a woman's body is being used to map her future territory.

Good examples are the many beauty contests that are currently being witnessed all over the world. The media has been very instrumental in promoting the beauty contests, a situation that continues to convince women that they cannot be beautiful unless they resemble the models. For example, the “ Miss Universe” and the “ Miss World” contests are now being held every year with contestants from almost all nations of the world participating. Various attires are constantly being designed in order to be won by the participants.

In addition, the contestants embrace various techniques of enhancing their attractiveness in order to win the coveted title of being the worlds’ most beautiful woman. Winning the contest becomes the greatest dream to come true. This has contributed to women 4. A reaction to lack of space in a male-dominated world Women’s’ obsession with appearance is a reaction to lack of space in a male dominated and male defined world. According to Ashe (Ashe, 2004), women even in the modern world just like in the past live within spheres that have been defined and demarcated by the men.

For instance, women have been confined to low paying jobs, kitchen and bedroom. Modernization has changed this and this has made the women want to break out from the spatial confinements they have acquired. They are therefore becoming aggressive and competitive with the men. The women are then considered to be a threat to the male power. When women fail to access spaces that for many years have been occupied by men, they are seen as failures and it becomes their fault for lack of achievement. On

the other hand, women who use their feminine identity to access the male dominated spaces are criticized as having no brains.

Due to this, women are said to suffer from an inferiority complex which some say it's an incurable psychological condition. As some women fight for their future space to compete equally with men, they need to move out from the spheres that have been demarcated for them by men. The women are seen as fighting for equal positions with men. This is because, confining women to the kitchen, bedroom and low paying jobs is seen by many women as oppressive situations that women have been for many years been put in due to their gender.

Breaking out of the oppressive situation for many women has encouraged their efforts to pursue attractive appearance. Unfortunately, for many women who try to fight for equal positions with men through their appearance end up destroying their lives and their bodies. Because fighting oppressive situations becomes their major focus in life, anything that the woman does to attract attention and prove themselves out to men becomes an obsession. Enhancing their appearance tends to make women feel better because they can be able to attract attention that for a long time women have been denied by male domination.

When women are carried away by their desire to seek attention in order to counter their feelings of inferiority, making their appearance attractive becomes an obsession. 5. Efforts to attain equality with men The common identity of women in reference to men has made women to rely on what men define as female attractiveness. In many cultural set ups including the

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contemporary society, men seems to dominate. This includes their opinion on what is right or wrong for a woman to do. Due to the specialization of the role of men and women in the society, the man is more superior to a woman.

Man becomes the subject and the absolute while a woman becomes “ the other” In the modern North American corporate capitalism society, a woman’s’ identity relates to that of a man. Her appearance is identified whether it is attractive depending on her ability to present her appearance as feminine according to a man’s view of a woman’s attractiveness. To acquire some security and safety in a society where her identify is described in reference to men, women work very hard to attain recognition and security through good appearance. This has no doubt contributed to a woman’s obsession with their appearance.

Women may alienate themselves from their bodies when self and body becomes divided. This may make women to have their bodies transformed into ugly, unruly and out of control objects. The self on the other hand becomes a web of reproach and hatred for an individual. This means that a woman who goes through such an experience is willing to submit her body to appearance enhancing practices even if they are harmful. Dressing styles such as tooth braces and casts are now being used to fight the woman’s identity as “ the other”. Conclusion In the contemporary world, the physical appearance has become a major concern for many people.

The most affected are the women, seen in their obsession with their appearance. People are now using a wide range of products to bring about changes in their appearance. Examples of products that are being used to

enhance appearance include cosmetics, decorative items, and body shape enhancing products, jewelry, rings, body paintings, and tattoos. Since the ancient times, women have always used certain products and products to change their appearance by enhancing their beauty. Many societies support this. However, what for many years have been search for beauty has turned into an obsession for women.

Appearance is no longer seen just as a way of promoting physical beauty, but also as a way of ensuring future existence for women. In a male dominated society, women have had to fight for equal opportunities with the men (feminism). In their quest for equality, women to some extent have used their uniqueness as women to take up roles and position that have for a long time been dominated by men. The need to change their lifestyle, to maintain their feminine identity, to fight for equality, and to secure their future existence makes women obsessed with their appearance.